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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [IS](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#) [SY](#) [KPAL](#) [US](#)
SUBJECT: SENATOR NELSON'S MEETING WITH LIKUD LEADER
NETANYAHU ON THE IRANIAN THREAT

Classified By: DCM Gene A. Cretz. Reason 1.4 (B/D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Senator Bill Nelson (FL) and his senior staff met with former prime minister (PM) and current Likud Party leader Binyamin Netanyahu on December 12 to discuss the Iranian nuclear threat. Netanyahu urged the U.S. to mobilize all its diplomatic and national efforts against Iran. "It is not just a Jewish or Israeli priority," he stressed. He suggested that a bipartisan focus on the Iranian threat would be an appropriate exit strategy for Iraq. Netanyahu minimized the strategic importance of prying Syria away from Iran, but urged the U.S. to make every effort to recruit Arab allies against Iran. He dismissed Hamas as an Iranian proxy. End Summary.

SYRIA - A SIDESHOW

¶2. (C) Senator Nelson explained his Syria travel plans, and asked how one might drive a wedge between Syria and Iran in an effort to pull Arab moderates together. Netanyahu agreed that it was important to talk to everyone -- every Arab state (except the Hamas leadership of the Palestinian Authority): "Create alliances with them against the (Iranian) danger." He told Senator Nelson that the U.S. should "examine Syria" -- and perhaps give them some assurances (in return for breaking away from Iran), so long as the Golan was not put on the table. Netanyahu claimed that Syria is now developing weaponry it did not have before this summer's Lebanon war.

¶3. (C) Netanyahu told the Senator that if the U.S. could pry Syria away from Iran, that would be good. He reiterated that he was not, however, willing to contemplate "giving them the Sea of Galilee" (by returning the Golan to Syria). Netanyahu stressed that even if one could pry Syria away, the SARG would still fall back into Iran's orbit if Iran went nuclear. Netanyahu suggested to the Senator that he ask President Asad to define his strategic objective: Does he want to lose the battle in the end?

IRANIAN THREAT: 1938 ALL OVER AGAIN

¶4. (C) Netanyahu claimed that Iran was not a "local bully" like the DPRK. Rather, its leadership aimed for Iran to become a world power, with up to 250 bombs to be built over the next ten years. In response to the Senator's question, Netanyahu indicated that Iran would cross the crisis threshold in one-to-three years once they developed fissionable material. He argued that Iran poses an

existential threat to Israel, and he claimed that Iranian leaders are preparing another Holocaust: "Hitler sought global conflict, then found the weapons to make it happen. Ahmadinejad is the reverse. If you don't stop them, he'll use them." Netanyahu continued: "If Iran goes nuclear, you (the U.S.) will lose control of the Middle East. The Persian Gulf will really be the Persian Gulf... It will start a nuclear arms race in the region, with Egypt and Saudi Arabia likely to seek such weapons." Netanyahu told the Senator that the Europeans understand the threat posed by Iran, noting that "they are not all Pollyannas."

15. (C) Senator Nelson asked Netanyahu for his ideas on how to stop the Iranians. Hard sanctions, including, for example, refined petroleum, could theoretically choke them, Netanyahu responded. If you secure Russian support for such sanctions, the Chinese would get on board, he suggested. Senator Nelson noted that the military option for dealing with the Iranian threat would be unpleasant, and Netanyahu acknowledged that "preemption has costs." The Senator asked whether Iran would indeed strike Israel knowing that Israel or the U.S. could destroy Iran. Netanyahu responded that Israel would be hit first, and it could not rely on deterrence in such circumstances, particularly since the Iranian leadership is "all bonkers." Netanyahu warned that the longer the U.S. waits in dealing with Iran, the harder it will be to do so. He encouraged the administration and Congress to "rise above politics, for the world is in peril."

IRAQ: A LOST CAUSE

16. (C) Netanyahu asserted that Iraq was "a lost cause,
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water under the bridge." All Middle East politics will gravitate to Iran. Senator Nelson asked whether regional leaders understand what was happening. Netanyahu affirmed that they did, and claimed they were terrified of the situation. "They want the U.S. to take on Iran, or Israel." At the end of the conversation, Netanyahu proclaimed that Iran would be the bipartisan exit strategy for Iraq.

PALESTINIANS

17. (C) On the situation in the West Bank and Gaza, Netanyahu offered no commentary other than to say that Hamas is eating out of Iran's hand.

18. (U) CODEL Nelson did not review this message.

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JONES